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Madness of Love, Love and Madness: A survey of the Works of Rose

Tremain in the 1980s and 1990s

Šílenství lásky, láska a šílenství: Přehled tvorby Rose Tremain v 80. A 90. letech

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Abstrakt

Rose Tremainová, současná britská autorka, narozená v roce 1943, patří mezi nejtalentovanější spisovatele své generace. Přesto její próza neskylá takový úspěch, jaký by si zasloužila. Dva historické romány, jež napsala, *Navrácená milost* a *Hudba a ticho*, jí přinesly značnou popularitu. V případě jejího dalšího díla se jí nicméně nedostalo patřičné pozornosti. Cílem této práce je seznámit čtenáře s výběrem z jejích románů a charakterizovat její dílo. Hlavní téma prózy Rose Tremainové je šilenství lásky, které zkoumá v podstatě ve všech svých textech. Pro účely této práce byly vybrány čtyři romány reprezentující její dílo: *Bazén*, *Navrácená milost*, *Posvátná krajina* a *Hudba a ticho*.

Na cestě za hledáním smyslu života se postavy Rose Tremainové často soustředí na romantickou lásku jakožto na jediný důvod k žití. Tremainová zdůrazňuje nesmyslnost takového počínání: ukazuje, že milostné vztahy samy o sobě nikdy nemůžou naplnit život. I když je možné čerpat pocit štěstí z partnerského vztahu, člověk vždy musí začít s prací sám na sobě, aby dosáhl naplnění. Tremainová upozorňuje, že svoji seberealizaci nemůžeme hledat v milostných vztazích; pokud tak činíme, náš vlastní pocit nedostatečnosti a méněcennosti bude mít pravděpodobně katastrofický vliv při hledání našeho životního partnera. Kromě toho budeme náchylní k mnoha chybám a falešným představám, v důsledku čehož si budeme vybírat partnera na základě jeho schopnosti „reprezentovat“ nás ve společnosti, z důvodu zvýšení pocitu vlastní hodnoty, namísto toho, abychom si jej vybrali na základě toho, jak se jeho povaha doplňuje s naší. Takovýmto partnerem se stane někdo pro nás zákonitě nedostupný - protože jeho nedostupnost bude v našich očích zvyšovat jeho hodnotu – jenž nebude moci opětovat naši lásku, i v případě, že s ním dosáhneme sexuálního vztahu nebo dokonce vstoupíme do manželství.

Postavy Rose Tremainové se často zamilovávají a jejich láska je obvykle nešťastná, z důvodů, které teď byly uvedeny. Cílem druhé kapitoly je popsat rozvoj mužských hrdinů, který je opakovaně vyjadřován motivem budování. Mužští hrdinové čtyř rozebíraných románů – Larry, Merivel, Martin a Kristián – musí překonat dětské představy o své vlastní hodnotě a ideální partnerce, aby mohli dospět. Pouze tehdy jsou

schopni navázat vzájemně prospěšné partnerské vztahy, které se zároveň již nejeví nutné pro dosažení jejich štěstí. Během procesu svého duševního zrání tyto postavy narážejí na mnohé těžkosti, způsobené převážně jejich jalovými sny a iluzemi. Tyto překážky v jejich duševním rozvoji se také symbolicky ukazují na objektech, které budují.

Ve třetí kapitole, která se zaměřuje spíše na ženské postavy románů Rose Tremainové, je prozkoumána souvislost mezi jednotlivci, kteří jsou společností nazíráni jakožto duševně choří, a společenskou většinou, jež tvoří ostatní postavy, které jsou všeobecně považovány za „normální.“ Posedlosti, které jsou již probírány v předcházející kapitole, jsou zde rozebrány do větší hloubky. Smyslem této kapitoly je ukázat autorčino popření tradičního chápání „normálnosti“ a „šílenství.“ Tremainová ve svých románech dokazuje, že všechno naše iracionální a škodlivé chování, které je patrné převážně z našich obsesí, jež většinou souvisí s láskou a sexualitou, je projevem určitého stupně šílenství.

Abstract

Rose Tremain, a contemporary British author born in 1943, belongs among the most talented writers of her generation. Nonetheless, her works are not as successful as she would deserve. The two historical novels that she has written, *Restoration* and *Music and Silence*, have brought her a remarkable popularity. As for her other works, however, she has not been given adequate attention. The aim of this thesis is to introduce the reader to some of her novels and characterize her work. A major theme in her prose is the madness of love that she examines basically in all her texts. For the purpose of this thesis, four novels have been chosen as representative of her work: *The Swimming Pool Season*, *Restoration*, *Sacred Country* and *Music and Silence*.

In the search for the meaning of life, Tremain's characters often concentrate on romantic love as the only reason for living. Tremain emphasizes the foolishness of this, showing that romantic relationship itself can never fulfil one's life. The happiness in a fruitful relationship is possible, but one always has to start with one's own personal development in order to achieve it. Tremain points out that we cannot look for self-realization in romantic relationships; otherwise, our sense of inferiority and insufficiency will probably have a catastrophic effect on the choice of our life partner. In addition, we will be susceptible to many errors and delusions, choosing the partner that would rather 'represent' us in society, thus 'increasing' our sense of 'worthiness,' than complement our personality. Such a partner will be somebody unattainable for us – because their unattainability will increase their desirability in our eyes – who, though we may achieve to have sex with them or even get married to them, will not return our love.

Tremain's characters frequently fall in love and their love is usually unhappy for the above mentioned reasons. The goal of the second chapter is to describe the development of male heroes, which is being repeatedly expressed by the metaphor of building. The male protagonists of the four books which are discussed in this thesis - Larry, Merivel, Martin and Christian - have to overcome their childish fantasies about their personal value and ideal woman in order to mature. Only then, they are capable of having an enriching romantic relationship, which, at the same time, does not prove to

be necessary for their happiness. During the process of their growing up, they come across many hardships, caused mainly by their futile dreams and illusions. These obstructions to their progress are also symbolically reflected on the structures that they build.

In the third chapter, which focuses rather on the female characters of Tremain's novels, the relation between individuals who are generally considered 'insane' and the societal majority composed by characters who pass as 'normal' is examined. The obsessions which are discussed already in the preceding chapter are considered here in a greater depth. The point of this chapter is to show the author's denial of the traditional concept of normality versus madness. Tremain suggests in her novels that all our irrational and hurtful behaviour, which is evident predominantly from our obsessions that are related mostly to love and sexuality, is a manifestation of a certain extent of madness.

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1. Introduction

The writer Rose Tremain was born in London in 1943. She was educated at the Sorbonne and is a graduate of the University of East Anglia, where she taught creative writing from 1988-1995. In 1983, she was listed among the twenty 'best young British novelists' along with such well-known writers as Martin Amis, Kazuo Ishiguro, Ian McEwan and Salman Rushdie. Her publications include novels and short-stories collections. In addition, she is the author of a number of radio and television plays, including *Temporary Shelter*, which won a Giles Cooper Award, and *One Night in Winter*, first broadcast by BBC Radio 4 in December 2001. She was awarded an honorary LittD by the University of East Anglia in 2000.

So far, Tremain has published eight novels and four collections of short stories. She is perhaps best known for two historical novels, depicting the life at court and outside it in the seventeenth century. *Restoration* (1989), set during the reign of Charles II, tells the story of Robert Merivel, an anatomy student and Court favourite, who falls in love with the King's mistress. The novel won the Angel Literary Award, the *Sunday Express* Book of the Year award and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction. It was also made into a film in 1996. *Music and Silence* (1999), the early seventeenth century story of an English lute player, Peter Claire, employed at the Danish Court to play for King Christian IV, won the Whitbread Novel Award.

However, Tremain is as capable of transforming the historical material as of creating more contemporary narratives. Her literary works and her teaching abilities influenced many young writers, for instance Kazuo Ishiguro, whose highly-rewarded novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) noticeably resembles an earlier Tremain's novel, *Sadler's Birthday* (1976), presenting the reminiscences of an elderly butler who lives alone in the house he has inherited from his former employers.

For the purpose of this thesis, four representative novels of Rose Tremain have been chosen: the two historical novels mentioned above, *The Swimming Pool Season* (1985), telling the stories of the inhabitants of Pomerac, a village in the French countryside, and *Sacred Country*, set in the Suffolk farms and in London, a novel centring on the life of a transsexual.

Due to the immense popularity of *Restoration* and *Music and Silence*, Tremain is often considered a historical writer. In these novels, she continues in the tradition of postmodern historical novels, initiated by the new historicists with their invocation of ‘the historicity of texts and the textuality of history,’ and developed by Umberto Eco and his novel *The Name of the Rose*.¹ Martha Tuck Rozett says that what postmodern historical novelists share with new historicists and what distinguishes their novels from traditional or classic historical fictions are

a resistance to old certainties about what happened and why; a recognition of the subjectivity, the uncertainty, the multiplicity of truths inherent in any account of past events; and a disjunctive, self-conscious narrative, frequently produced by eccentric and/or multiple narrating voices.²

Because of the originality of Tremain’s novels, we can find these features both in *Restoration* and *Music and Silence*, the texts which demonstrate unsettling reimaginings of the seventeenth century England and Denmark. Tremain’s novels are works of Realism; however, they break the rules of the traditional nineteenth century narrative in order to point out the subjectivity of one dominant perspective. In *Restoration*, Tremain introduces us to an unreliable and eccentric narrator, who may portray the atmosphere of his age much better than a traditional character of historical novels or an omniscient narrator. He describes himself as an every-day, ordinary man, and his unattractive appearance and often ridiculous manners challenge our traditional notions about a protagonist of a historical novel.

Music and Silence is perhaps even more daring in postmodern narrative strategies than *Restoration*. There are several narrators (Kirsten Munk, Francesca O’Fingal, Marcus Tilsen) who often show us the same event from a different perspective than in the passages where the emphatic third-person narrator identifies with other characters (Peter Claire, Christian, Emilia). As in *Restoration*, Tremain chooses here predominantly common people as her narrators, the ones that we cannot usually learn about in historical documents. Thus, she creates an unusual and provocative view on history.

¹ Louis Montrose, ‘Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History,’ *English Literary Renaissance* 1986: 16.

² Martha Tuck Rozett, ‘Constructing a world: How postmodern historical fiction reimagines the past,’ *Clio. Fort Wayne* Winter 1996: 145.

However, the main purpose of these two novels is not to show the subjectivity of history but to draw parallels between the past and the present which we live in. Tremain has chosen the particular settings of her historical novels because they show connectedness to our present world. In the time of the reign of King Christian IV, Denmark was characterized by a spending spree of its higher classes which lead to excesses of many kinds. In England during the reign of Charles II, the situation was very similar. The resulting materialism and refusal of religious/spiritual values lead to loss of meaning, superficiality and many delusions. In the novels where Tremain describes the (more) contemporary world, we can see society fighting with precisely the same negative aspects of civilization. For example, the materialism and the pursuit of social success described in *Restoration* can be likened to the economic and political upheaval of Thatcher's England when *Restoration* was published, as Carole Angier points out in the essay 'An Anatomist's Sadness.'³

Tremain's primary goal is to show not just the subjectivity of history but mainly the subjectivity of what we perceive as 'reality.' Nevertheless, all events and all people's lives have become 'history' by the time when they are written about. From this point of view, it is not important to look for the differences between Tremain's historical and contemporary narratives. Instead, we should focus on the literary tendencies that these texts have in common.

The narrative structures in *The Swimming Pool Season* and *Sacred Country* are similarly experimental as in Tremain's historical novels. In *The Swimming Pool Season*, there is, like in *Music and Silence*, a third-person narrator who often shows the events from the perspective of the novel's characters. There are also many dialogues in the novel where the characters express themselves without the mediation of the narrator. The same combination of a third-person, emphatic, 'not-objective' narrator and first-person, often eccentric narrators, which is used in *Music and Silence*, is also applied to *Sacred Country*.

The unreliable narrator and the polyphony of narrative voices function as means of defying the author's authority. In the introduction to *Britské spisovatelky na konci tisíciletí*, Milada Franková lists among such postmodern methods also the fragmentary

³ Carole Angier, 'An Anatomist's Sadness: Restoration,' *New Statesman* Sept 29 1989: 35.

nature of the text.⁴ Because of the sudden and illogical changing of narrative voices, this element is also typical of Tremain's novels.

There remains one more aspect to take into consideration. It is the feminist element of Tremain's novels. We cannot define her novels as feminist, for the reason that she does not focus on her female characters any more than on her male ones. Because of the attention that she gives to her male characters, as I will show in the following chapter, it rather seems that she is often more interested in men than in women in her writing. However, we may consider feminist her focus on the power relations between the sexes. Sarah Sceats points out that Tremain's writing is

imbued with a strong suggestion that patriarchal society and fixed gender relations might be otherwise. Many of her characters are thus marginal or undefined in some way. Others undergo radical, depolarising change; her most heartily 'masculine' characters are feminised by experience; her women take on roles or assume characteristics associated normatively with men, and one even adopts male gender.⁵

However, we will not find in Tremain's texts a dominant voice that would favour the female point of view. Tremain does not have illusions either about her male or female characters, while truthfully portraying the weaknesses of both genders. These weaknesses often provide her characters with the stimulus for seeking the transcendental. The path towards it is, however, full of obstructions. Tremain's heroes can never really achieve the sacred, they can only approximate to it, and during the process they necessarily come across a lot of temptations which threaten to misguide them: their obsessions, an easy and attractive escape to dreaming and the delusions they have about themselves and others.

Due to her focus on obsession, Tremain is naturally interested in the theme of madness. She shows that one of the main causes of unhappiness and insanity is the lack of love. Love is not something that just happens to her characters; they have to overcome a lot of difficulties when looking for it and be careful not to mistake it for anything else. Milada Franková says that 'Tremain examines the madness of love

⁴ Milada Franková, *Britské spisovatelky na konci tisíciletí* [British Women Writers at the End of the Millennium] (Brno: Masarykova Univerzita v Brně, 2003) 8.

⁵ Sarah Sceats, 'Appetite, Desire and Belonging in the Novels of Rose Tremain,' *The Contemporary British Novel Since 1980* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005) 177.

actually in all her texts.’⁶ Love and sexuality is such a delicate issue that it is always prone to breakage. Therefore, when misused, it can hurl people into confusion and subsequently also into madness. In this thesis, I will show the problems with the search for love which marks the development of Tremain’s heroes, and discuss the possibility of insanity that is connected with these problems.

⁶ Milada Franková, *Britské spisovatelky na přelomu tisíciletí* [*British Women Writers at the Turn of the Millennium*] (Brno: Masarykova Univerzita v Brně, 2003)113.

2. Love, dreams and delusions

There is a sense of awe at the wonderful in Tremain's characters which causes them to seek escapes from their ordinary lives. They often look for the transcendental in wrong places and so they are prone to many errors and delusions. A common delusion is falling in love with a person who is indifferent to the lover. The unwillingness of the characters to accept reality raises the possibility of obsession.

A part of the scheme that Tremain uses in the plots where male characters are dominant is a motif of building of structures which are somehow significant for their builders and perceived by them as monumental, whether they are an observatory (*Music and Silence*) or a garden hut (*The Way I Found Her*).

The process of making these structures is an important metaphor for trying to realize one's dreams and desires. By building their monuments, the male characters want to prove their qualities, especially their manliness, to (re)gain self-respect and often to win admiration of women (which is frequently a way of gaining self-respect).

Achieving the vision is, however, not an easy task: at some point in the novel, the buildings remain incomplete. What spoils the work are often the weaknesses and obsessions of the male characters that have to be overcome so that the process of building can be completed. During the building, the purpose of the structures changes – they become the imprint of the builders. Their form and incompleteness refer to the personalities of the male characters; likewise, their gradual construction implies the development of these characters.

2. 1 *The Swimming Pool Season*: Larry

Larry feels useless in the marriage with Miriam, because she is stronger than him and not in love with him any more; she does not need him. Since the failure of Larry's swimming pool business, their marital roles have reversed. Before that, Larry was in charge of making money; for a year now, their sole income has been provided by Miriam. Larry senses that his wife is superior to him both financially and emotionally. Their relationship resembles that of a foolish child and his wise mother, and Larry often finds this model unbearable:

‘...his wife – in all her actions [...] – has tended to be right and admirable, whereas he has tended to be clumsy and base. Must she be wise till they die? Will he, dying before her, croak out yet one more, yet one last apology before putting her to the inconvenience and expense of burying him at Ste Catherine? Briefly, he envies men who have married women in whom, beauty aside or notwithstanding, there's nothing to admire.’⁷

Larry is insecure and because he cannot find self-respect in himself, he seeks appreciation by other people. His assurance, already fragile, has been shaken by the bankruptcy of the swimming pool company: ‘when it all went, he felt helpless, like a rape victim, fouled up and helpless’ (33, SPS). The victims of rape are usually females; therefore, Larry unconsciously associates himself with the vulnerability and weakness that are in the patriarchal society traditionally viewed as feminine. Tremain likes to challenge gender stereotypes; her heroes are just as vulnerable and prone to hurt as her heroines.

The mental paralysis that has affected Larry after the failure of the swimming pool business is symbolized by the overflowing septic tank in front of his house, which Larry should have changed for another about a year ago. He knows that ‘something will have to be done about the tank’ (SPS, 14), but he prefers escaping into his fantasies instead of dealing with the real life. Miriam then leaves him to be with her dying mother in England, and Larry starts unconsciously to look for substitute for her to fill the emptiness inside of him.

⁷ Rose Tremain, *The Swimming Pool Season* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1985) 170 - future references to the book will be marked as (SPS) after the quotation

Without solving the problem of the stinking and polluting tank, he starts working on his dream, the grandest swimming pool he can imagine. This shortcut shows that he is reluctant to leave the landscape of dreams; rather than being a rational action, the building of the swimming pool becomes an intensification of his dreams.

Larry is a materialistic man. Like Merivel, he is emotionally attached to many things, especially his car and the swimming pools that he has made. Sometimes, he seems to value things more than people:

When Aquazure collapsed, Larry was wounded so much less by the sad reproaches of his employees, by the grin sighings of the bankers and solicitors, than by the loss of the thing itself, the pools. The pools became so magnificent, after he'd lost them. (SPS, 31)

What Larry likes about material things is their accessibility. Unlike people, they can be enjoyed as long as their ownership lasts. Human relationships are of course much more complicated than that; one cannot ever possess – at least not entirely - another human being. Larry, however, tends to think about his wife and his car in the same terms. At the beginning of the novel, he finds that he has no romantic feelings for Miriam, but this does not matter to him, as long as she is 'his': 'The warmth of Miriam in his bed is right, perfectly right, and he is grateful for these calm moments of certainty. Miriam and his car: to these he belongs. He is theirs, they his. This is *right*' (SPS, 15).

Nevertheless, Larry's 'moments of certainty' are just an illusion; he knows that his wife has never actually 'belonged' to him: 'Larry envies his own son his robust mother, yet often feels that for a wife he might have chosen someone more fragile, with a greater need of him' (SPS, 19). Miriam is too independent a woman for the immature Larry. In relationships with women, Larry desires to possess; to be as certain of owning them as he is certain of owning his car.

Another example of this tendency of his is his relationship with Agn  s. His affection for her, which he wrongly interprets as protective, fatherly love at the

beginning, turns out to be a selfish sexual attachment that makes him want to kill Xavier, Agnès's lover, for having sex with her. In his dreams, Agnès turns into a plaything that he can totally control and manipulate with: 'He'd like to kidnap her. Dress and undress her like a doll. Make her room beautiful' (SPS, 194). His wish to build the swimming pool for his wife is all of a sudden exchanged by the fantasy of building it for Agnès. He dreams about her standing by it and indulges in imagining 'the imprint of her wet feet on his terrace' (SPS, 26), the fantasy with strong erotic undertones (the *wetness* of *her* feet on *his* terrace) that he only later recognizes as sexual. Basically, he builds the swimming pool as a recreation site for 'his' Barbie doll.

Later on, Larry realizes that the main purpose of the swimming pool is not to serve as an offering either for Miriam or Agnès. He begins to believe that he is building it 'for the thing itself, for Pomerac' (SPS, 225). When the swimming pool is destroyed in the end, it is paradoxically a good thing for Larry. After his son Thomas informs him about it, Larry says out loud, in the passion of his rage, what has been true since the beginning of the building; that he has been building it as a monument to *himself* (SPS, 284). Thus, the real purpose of his building the pool is revealed to him: through the structure, he wanted to prove his worthiness and achieve admiration of others.

Though he feels desperate and helpless at the moment, he is not left with nothing. He has made a few good friendships, primarily with Nadia and Klaus, and he has become a member of the Pomerac community while his wife was in England, thus developing an identity outside his marriage. He has become more independent on Miriam and the knowledge of his lack of self-respect that makes him try to win admiration of others through possessing things (and people) may lead to his internal transformation.

Throughout the novel, Tremain favours the love of Klaus and Gervaise, a rather unconventional couple - a married woman and her lover living in one household together with Gervaise's husband. The ending remains open and so we do not know what will happen with Larry, but the romantic love of Gervaise and Klaus, having the last word in the novel, suggests that Larry's failure may lead to a better understanding of himself and a new beginning in his marriage. Larry's greedy dreams of possessing things and people have to be forgotten so that he can change. Such a change is

suggested by the metaphor of an empty space, the swimming pool (that alludes to Larry's futile dreams), being filled with the earth, which signifies Larry's coming back to reality.

2. 2 *Restoration*: Merivel

Larry bears many similarities with Merivel, the chief protagonist of *Restoration*. Though Merivel is much more impulsive a character than Larry, they are both immoderate in their internal fantasies. Moreover, they both suffer from low self-esteem, seek escapes from reality and find comfort in familiar objects. Merivel is also similar to Larry in the sense that his attachment to material things mirrors his possessiveness in love. In addition, the lives of both these characters are divided to times of childish mirth and boastfulness and times of shame and sadness. Once when he is in a melancholic mood, Merivel reflects on the reason of his affection first for the King and later for Celia, starting from the insufficient parental love that led to a strong need of his to be constantly reminded of his value by others:

‘I have never, I think, held any notion of my own indispensability. As a child my mother looked at me lovingly and would no doubt have wept a while had I been eaten by a badger in the woods of Vauxhall. But this is all. She would not have died without my hand to hold [...] In my brief delirious sojourn at Whitehall, I verily believed I was becoming indispensable to the King, but time has shown me that here I deceived myself utterly. More recently I have longed for Celia to esteem and value me and hold my life to be of prime importance, but much of the time she behaves towards me as if I was not there.’⁸ (R, 142)

Like Larry, Merivel tends to be dependent on the people he falls in love with. His prime love interest is the King, the person whom he cannot stop loving no matter how far away from him in space and time he is. Merivel does not care how foolish this love is; what matters is its strength that surpasses all other love affairs of his. At the end of the novel, after a long separation from the King and the Court, Merivel realizes how much in love with the King he still is: ‘And the yearning that I had to see the King was as deep and immovable as the yearning of a lover’ (R, 333).

⁸ Rose Tremain, *Restoration* (London: Penguin Books, 1994) 142...future references to the book will be marked as (R) after the quotation

Merivel's love for the King is in a way similar to Larry's love for his wife, Miriam. Both Miriam and the King are independent figures, strong and admirable personalities, whom the central male characters of the two books envy and yearn for at the same time. It is difficult to understand them and gain their attention, which increases both their desirability and the despair of their admirers. Tremain uses the same romantic scheme in the two novels: the King and Miriam have two main admirers, one of which is the main protagonist of the book (Merivel and Larry) and the other one a supplementary character (Celia and Dr. O) whose desire reflects the desire of the primary character. During the absence of the King and Miriam, Merivel and Larry find a substitute in a strong temporary feeling for a woman (Celia and Agnés) who is as attractive as her predecessor but whose fragile physical appearance stimulates the men's need to possess.

In spite of Celia and Agnés's seductive power, Merivel and Larry return to their fatal loves at the end. When Merivel unexpectedly meets the King nearby his new London apartment and when Larry gets a message of his wife's confession of love, they are impatient to see their beloved again, which shows that they have been at the back of their minds all the time. Their perseverance in affection, whether for people or things, is a substitute with which they try to fill the emptiness inside them. The roots of Larry's and Merivel's passion are in their existential thirst for something that would transcend their human lives. This unquenchable passion is expressed in both texts by the metaphor of enthusiastic building.

Larry has the swimming pool that he believes to build for the 'thing itself,' but which, in the end, turns out to be a mere extension of his ego (see above). He has sought greatness in the wrong place – in himself – and this realization may finally enable him to make a new start. Merivel's creation, the Bidnold house, is also taken from him so that he can mature. When the most important part of it – its circular room in the West Turret- is restored to him in the end, he is adult enough to complete his creation, i.e. to complete his personality.

When Merivel moves to Bidnold, he starts 'building' it, not the house itself but its interior. The zeal with which he starts designing the inside of the house reveals his

determination to find a compensation for losing the companionship of the King. Bidnold becomes a place where he can store his passion for his beloved and show off his association with the King, when he invests a great deal of the money he has got from him into the Bidnold interior. He designs all rooms according to his liking for colours and eccentric luxury (except an upper room in the West Turret which he leaves empty). As a result, the character of the newly designed house reflects Merivel himself:

I had made it mine. In every room I saw some part of my character reflected. Bidnold was Merivel anatomised. From my colourful and noisy belly you ascended to my heart which, though it craved variety also favoured concealment, and so to my brain, a small but beautiful place, occasionally filled with light and yet utterly empty. (R, 182)

Like Larry, Merivel designs the interior to let the world know about his existence, and although it lacks the pathos of Larry's pool, it is the same egotistic exhibition of his character.

Paradoxically, before Larry's pool is destroyed, i.e. refilled with earth, it remains empty and incomplete. There is a glimpse of beauty but also a vacant, useless space, and the whole pictures Larry's personality, aiming for the good but paralysed by immature fantasies. Until the end, Merivel's house at Bidnold also remains incomplete. Its empty space, the circular room in the West Turret, also functions as a place containing intangible dreams.

In her novels, Tremain shows that dreams are not wrong as such, but when they do not lead to anything real, they become futile and exhausting. Merivel refers to the empty room as his 'brain', because his brain is another vacant space waiting to be filled by something substantial. In the meantime, Merivel is incapable of finding any value in himself that would allow him to inhabit the room:

The room was still empty, still untouched [...] It will never be used now, this seemingly perfect room, I thought. At least, not by me. For it is surely the place which, though it aspires to do so, my mind can neither order nor understand. It is beyond my limit. I am earthbound, gross, ignorant. I will never reach to here. (R, 73)

In his infatuation with the King and Celia and in affairs with women in general, Merivel experiences his sexuality with all his senses, falling for such varying sensual elements as the King's elegant legs, Celia's voice, Rosie's soft flesh, Violet's smell of rage, and the King's sweet 'Royal kisses'. In the final chapter, when Katherine is dead, Margaret is at the wet nurse, and Merivel spends time alone in his apartment above the lute maker's shop, he is taken hold by what he calls a 'colossal epidemic of dreaming' (R, 358):

Night after night I floated into Bidnold and landed light as a plume and brushed surfaces of things - the polished tops of tables, the stretched brocade of scarlet sofas, the milky satin of cushions, the tooled leather spines of books, the dented pewter handle of the coal scuttle – and then was carried by the wind out into the sky and hung like a ghost above the park, filling myself with colour so that I became fat with it, with the purple of the beeches and the lush green of the grass. (R, 358)

All the things that excite Merivel's senses meet in Bidnold when he gets sick with the 'epidemic of dreaming'. The passion, which he feels with all his senses, focuses on this one place that is an embodiment of his personality. The longing for Bidnold mirrors the longing for being himself, in the place where he belongs.

Designing the interior of Bidnold is a process leading to self-knowledge. The last room that is empty, the circular room, symbolizes Merivel's wisdom that remains stunted for most of his life. During his stay at Bidnold, Merivel used to think that the room was above him, and he used to visit it only in the scarce moments of contemplation.

At the climax of the story, the King restores the room to Merivel, thus showing him that now he deserves to own and inhabit such a noble place. According to Sarah Sceats, Merivel's restoration to the house is a '(re)discovery of belonging, but in a clearly feminised mode', since Merivel is 'reduced, restrained and enhanced with a daughter.'⁹ Sceats considers Merivel's parental role as the final discovery of his (feminised) identity. Similarly, Martha Tuck Rozett sees the climax of the story in

⁹ Sceats, 171

Merivel's 'reconciliation with his beloved King, in a strange parody of the reunions of lover and beloved at the end of historical romances.'¹⁰ The reconciliation with the beloved would be another example of an ending in a traditionally feminine mode.

However, the symbolic meaning of the white colour that the circular room is painted with implies that Merivel's fulfilling of his identity could lie in something different. White colour stands in opposition to the bright palette of colours with which Merivel used to surround himself and which allude to his physicality, the most distinct part of his personality. Nevertheless, there is another side of Merivel's character that he is shown at Whittlesea and that develops after he leaves the hospital.

The responsibility that he has for Katharine does not allow him to be idle. When he needs money for both of them, he decides to earn it by helping people, returning to his long forgotten medicine profession. He risks his life, when he visits the houses of people whose relatives died from plague to give them a prophylactic, and also when he helps to rescue an old woman from a burning house. The extreme conditions of the Great Plague and the Great Fire of London test his integrity; his newly found ability to sacrifice himself for others and his refusal of selfishness take him higher so that he can eventually reach the symbolic height of the West Turret room.

During one of their dialogues at Whittlesea, Katharine tells him about the 'waft of death' that she sees in people. To Merivel's question what colour this waft might be in him, she replies that it is white (R, 222). Merivel does not take heed of that, white being of 'no significance' to him, but Katherine's remark turns out to be an important prophecy. White colour symbolizes the intellectual and spiritual that Merivel needs to discover in himself. As he enters the highly situated, circular room, he is surrounded by whiteness: there are white birds clustered on its windows (R, 369), as he is 'standing in the white room' in his 'torn white nightshirt'(R, 370). The vacant room that Merivel once associated with his mind is finally useful, occupied by Merivel and his daughter. However, more than Merivel's adaptation to the domesticated life, the ending signifies his evolution and his newly gained self-acceptance.

¹⁰ Rozett, 12

It is noticeable that it is only the West Turret room that is restored to Merivel, not the whole house. One of the main Merivel's weaknesses (and Larry's weaknesses) has been materialism and the desire to possess, both things and people. Even his love for Celia, which he believed to be true, was a mere lust and need to possess; he did not want to love her but to own her as a sex toy that would help him to better self-confidence and social position.

His 'love' for her was a consequence of his male pride that awakened in him when he realized he was an 'object of pity': 'Poor Merivel, goes my little lament, he has married the woman with the most beautiful voice in England and she cannot bear him to come near her!'(R, 112) With the gain of the West Turret room - the pure, empty, spiritual space - Merivel has an opportunity to refuse his former materialism, the ownership of the things he used to love - the tables, sofas, cushions, books – that are now literally bellow him.

2.3 *Sacred Country*: Mary/Martin

Mary, the main hero of *Sacred Country*, can be considered a male character, since she has felt to be a male for most of her life and since she becomes 'he' as the story progresses. There is the same dark aspect to her masculine sexuality that we can see by Merivel and Larry, i.e. the will to control and dominate. There is also a motif of building in Mary's story, though much more abstract than in *Restoration* and *The Swimming Pool Season*. It has to do with Mary's physical transformation, as will be described bellow.

Apart from the temporary infatuation with Mary's classmate Lindsay, Pearl is the only person for whom Mary has romantic feelings. As it is frequent with romantic love, Mary loves Pearl selfishly; secretly, she wants her for herself. When Mary is six and her teacher asks the pupils to bring their 'precious things' to the class, Mary brings the little baby Pearl. Since then, she calls Pearl her 'precious thing'. Though it may sound like an innocent endearment, the word 'thing' implies that Mary tends to consider Pearl an object which belongs to her and which she can manipulate with.

Although Mary is not aware of her affection until it is too late, her love for Pearl begins as early as in the moment when she decides to bring her to the class. Fifteen years later, when Mary decides to undergo the medical treatment that will change her sex, so that she will not only feel like a man but also look like one, she does it because of Pearl. Just for her, she wants to become a complete man. With the help of doctors, she begins to build for Pearl: not an actual building but a new, male body out of her old, unwanted female one. She wants the transformation in order to become worthy of her beloved: 'The woman I wanted was Pearl. I wanted to be Pearl's universe. For her, I would have remade myself as often and as completely as she demanded. She could have gone on inventing me until death parted us.'¹¹

Though all Mary's life is constructed around Pearl, the image of their future together is only her delusion. It is a cruel irony that Pearl is going to marry Mary's brother Timmy, who, as a child, got all the parental love and appreciation which was refused to Mary. When Pearl tells Mary the news about her getting married, Mary reacts in a violent outburst, hurling her body onto Pearl's and kissing her against her will, very much like Merivel when he forces a kiss upon Celia's lips. In her rage, Mary forgets all the tender affection she has had for Pearl and only wants to take possession of her body:

Using all my strength, I took her thin wrists in my hands and pinned them down behind her head [...] I opened my mouth and put it on Pearl's. She tried to twist her head away from me but where her head moved, mine followed [...] I put my tongue into her mouth and sucked all her sweetness. I drank her. My head grew light with the sweetness of my precious thing. And I laid my pain on her breasts (SC, 274).

There is a suppressed aggression in Mary that manifests itself in this dramatic moment of frustrating delusion and loss of meaning. Under the weight of hard life, the traumatised part of Mary only wants to hurt, destruct and violate. The same aggressive impulse made Mary attempt to kill her brother for stealing unknowingly the affection of their parents that should have been focused on both of them. Mary is not to be blamed

¹¹ Rose Tremain, *Sacred Country* (New York: Pocket Books, 1992) 311 - future references to the book will be marked as (SC) after the quotation.

for this dark side of her personality; her parents are responsible for that. The aggression comes from her father Sonny, who has treated her only with contempt and hatred since Timmy was born. Mary's dysfunctional mother Estelle has only supported Sonny in his violence by her passivity.

It was Sonny's act of violence, the worst one that he has shown her, that finally made her run away from home. For some time, Mary had been bandaging her breast, desperately wanting to deny the fact that she had been born as a woman. Sonny, incapable of tolerating any departure from a norm, was determined to manifest his patriarchal dominance. The result was one of the most brutal scenes in Tremain's prose, in which Sonny took scissors and cut Mary's bandages against her will:

His wrist was against her windpipe, beginning to choke her [...] Sonny cut into the wad of bandage in the cleft between Mary's breasts [...] One arm of the scissors dug into her breast bone, bruising her [...] She could smell his body which had never touched hers since she was a little girl in his arms. She felt a sickly sorrow, like a dose of poison going into her and spreading all through her.

She started to cry. This was a thing she never wanted to do and never wanted him to see as long as she lived. Not crying was what had given her hope. Now she was sobbing and she couldn't stop [...] When he'd cut through the wedge of bandage, he pulled back her shirt. He held her breasts in his hands. He pulled them up, showing them to her. He said: 'Look at them. Go on. You look at them.'(102)

When she was a little girl, Mary swore that Sonny would never see her cry. Without saying it, they both understood crying as a manifestation of femininity. Sonny often used to humiliate or hurt Mary so that she would start crying and thus 'prove' her femininity and natural inferiority to him, man and her father. She could not bear crying to which he finally forced her because she considered it her defeat.

The hurt that Mary causes Pearl is a repetition – though much less brutal - of the sexual violence that Sonny committed on his daughter when he cut the bandages and touched her breasts. According to Sonny's traumatised mind, it was only natural to show his daughter that she should stick to being a woman when she is one. Similarly, Mary wants to enforce her idea of what is being right, i.e. that Pearl should belong to

her, when she kisses her, and in the moment, she does not question the wrongness of the violence.

Being a much more sensitive character than her father, Mary realizes after a moment of blind aggression that she has done wrong and asks Pearl for forgiveness. Nevertheless, like in the case of Merivel's uncontrollable passion, the damage cannot be undone. Pearl begins to pack her things immediately, while repeating: 'I am not a *thing*. I am not a *thing*. I am not a *thing*!' (SC, 274) In this way, she protects herself against Mary's/Martin's possessiveness.

After a series of operations, Mary looks manly enough to become Martin. With his new identity, he moves to Tennessee to start a new life, finally settling on Judge Riveaux's farm. Sterns, the psychiatrist who has lead him/her through his/her transformation, sends Martin a letter in which he calls him home to have the 'reconstructive surgery', during which Martin's penis will be created. However, for Martin, building the male body has become a dream strongly bound with Pearl. Therefore, when Martin finds out that Pearl will never be his, he does not consider it important any more to complete the process.

In the end, Martin abandons dreaming, since he does not need it any more: reality has become good enough for him. He enjoys that he can at last live freely without anybody threatening and hurting him, focusing on *being* instead of *becoming*:

I don't dream about anything. Days unfold. Martin lives them. He works through the hot afternoons. He drinks lemonade made by Beulah. He listens to Jeremiah's life. He strokes the necks of the peacocks. He sleeps soundly in the big bed. I am him and he is me and that's all. That's enough. (SC, 311)

He has come to the USA because Sterns advised him to change the 'external landscape' (SC, 278). On the farm in Tennessee, the repressive countryside of Mary/Martin's past is transformed into the liberated countryside of the present. The couple that he lives there with actually cares for him, thus compensating for the bad parents he/she has had.

When Mary was small, she used to sleep in an iron bed with a sag in the middle. She said about it: '[My parents] put me into the sag and gravity made them fall towards me, wedging me in' (SC, 10). This memory illustrates her parents' suffocating love that they transferred from her to her brother after he was born. The big bed in which Martin sleeps soundly now signifies his liberation from his abusive father and negligent mother. He even has the peacocks to caress to supplant the peacock pet that was taken away from him/her when he/she was a small child. In his new life, Martin has the opportunity to rediscover his lost childhood.

2.4 *Music and Silence*: Christian

One of the main heroes of *Music and Silence* is the Danish King Christian. Tremain observes his life from two perspectives, as he inhabits two social roles; one is that of the public figure who has to take care of his people and the other is the more personal role of a friend and husband. In years 1629-1630, which is the setting of the novel, Denmark faces a harsh economic crisis: due to the 'shoddiness' of its craftsmen and the immoderate spending of higher classes, it sinks into poverty. The bad situation of the kingdom reflects the untidy personality of Christian whose guilt and weaknesses pull him into despair.

Being an ambitious king, Christian has initiated many architectural projects, but, apart from the buildings made for the public, there are also 'private' buildings, which he has built for himself and/or for his wives, and these are crucial for understanding his present and past. First, there is Frederiksborg Castle, which represents his ego. It has the same purpose as Larry's swimming pool or the interior of Merivel's house: to show (off) its builder's personality. Like Larry, Christian built it as a monument to himself, calling it 'a universe in his own honour' and '*a monument to hugeness*.'¹² The hugeness of the castle was supposed to emphasize the masculinity of Christian, who is 'taller than his father, larger, with a greater girth of body and spirit' (MaS, 259).

¹² Rose Tremain, *Music and Silence* (New York: Pocket Books, 2001) 259 - future references to the book will be marked as (MaS) after the quotation

Two decades after Frederiksborg is built, Christian decides to move into it again within the money-sparing plan. With the life experience he now has, he realizes that he 'no longer knows what Frederiksborg is *for*' (MaS, 261). On account of the present poor condition of Denmark, the self-confidence that Frederiksborg projects seems absurd. Instead of the boastful masculinity, evoking the 'sound of rude laughter' (MaS, 260), the castle is now the embodiment of egotism and careless spending that has lead Denmark on the edge of bankruptcy.

Another such 'private' project is a monumental observatory, planning of which initiated Christian's first wife, Anna Catherine. According to her dream, the observatory should be 'a round tower, with an internal pathway, wide enough for a coach and pair, spiralling round and round up to a platform at the top from which she could look at the moon' (MaS, 199). Anna's fairy-tale vision resembles the West Turret that Merivel often dreams of. The observatory and the turret are both high situated, circular spaces. Their roundness signifies perfection; their height symbolizes their apparent unattainability. All in all, both spaces represent the desire for something sacred, the longing to be 'filled with a sense of wonder' (MaS, 239).

Anna Catherine's dream is a concretization of one of Christian's 'reveries of construction'. Once he told Anna: 'We know that bodies fall towards the earth, but we do not know what is the nature of the thing called "heaviness"' (MaS, 197). He told her that he wished to 'defy this heaviness and let the cities of Denmark move outwards into the sky' (MaS, 198). However, during Anna's live, such heaviness could not be overcome. Puzzling over the construction of the observatory, the architects used to say that 'the weight of such a road, over such a width, would always be too great for the centre-post to bear' (MaS, 199).

Some time after Anna Catherine dies, Christian falls in love with Kirsten Munk. The marriage with Anna was political and it turned out to be a happy one; Anna had all the qualities that a wife and mother of her age should have, being responsible and tender both to Christian and their children. Kirsten is a woman totally lacking in such qualities. Christian chooses her because of his personal preferences which prove to be wrong. What he seeks in women is not primarily a good character but an outstanding beauty. Since he made friends with Bror Brorson, a beautiful but also honest and loyal

man, he has had a tendency to associate physical beauty with moral integrity. Moreover, when he is given a free hand after Anna's death as far as choosing a wife is concerned, he starts looking for a woman that he could boast about and that would represent his masculinity like Frederiksborg does.

Despite all her ethereal beauty, Kirsten is a wicked character. She is spoilt, deceitful, selfish and revengeful; a woman incapable of loving even her own children, and so the reader inclines to seeing her as a villain of the novel, while taking pity on her husband Christian, who is, assumedly, a victim of Kirsten's spiteful nature.

This simplified view is, however, tricky. Tremain does not favour the black and white interpretation of reality. She encourages her audience to read her books thoroughly and to look at her characters from different perspectives. At first, we may easily condemn Kirsten as a bad person, unconsciously diminishing the few scarce qualities she has: her courage in dealing with Emilia's family, her strive for independence, her persistence. On the second reading, however, we may be able to appreciate them and, similarly, we may better realize the vices in Christian's character that we intentionally neglected before, such as the insensitivity to his musicians that he keeps, for the sake of 'wonder', in a cold, dark cellar.

The ambivalence of Kirsten's character, due to which we cannot simply condemn her as a bad person, does not alter the fact that she is not suitable to be Christian's wife. The reason of that is her untameable spirit. Her adulterous affair with Count Otto, the negligence of her children and her disrespect to Christian can be understood as manifestations of her vicious nature but also as acts of defiance by which she asserts her independence and unwillingness to submit to any man - even if he is a king.

Christian is, of course, infuriated by Kirsten's disobedience. He is determined to subdue her to his power, and so he often basically rapes her. Even if we take into consideration the contemporary context, when women were supposed to obey their husbands in everything, we cannot doubt his guilt. Christian himself realizes that to demand complete obedience of Kirsten is morally wrong:

Sometimes, God forgive me, I take her against her will, reasoning that I am the King and her husband, and she cannot deny me. But that resolves nothing. It leaves a bitter gall. (MaS, 110)

Thus, Christian exults in his power in which he can make Kirsten have sex with him and at the same time he is repelled by it. His obsession with Kirsten causes that he cannot give up the relationship, although it is draining him. To the futility of the marriage adds the fact that building of the observatory, which stands for the divine and good, has been interrupted after Anna's death and has not been renewed ever since.

Instead of Frederiksborg, Christian lives with Kirsten in Rosenborg that he has built as a monument to their marriage. Because of the nature of the marriage, Rosenborg is as devoid of meaningful purpose as Frederiksborg. Later, after the king banishes his wife from him, he finds that Rosenborg was 'born out of caprice, out of rhapsody' and refuses to live in it any more (MaS, 245). Only when he gets to know the kind, thoughtful and obedient Vibeke and is able to restore the original purpose of Rosenborg – which was to host a happy couple - he decides to move there again.

When Christian is not disturbed by Kirsten's proximity any more, he is finally able to mature in his relationship with women. Tired from the suffering that the marriage with Kirsten caused him, he has learned to appreciate true affection instead of pretty façade; he no longer needs a woman that would represent him. Rather, he desires a loyal life companion. Vibeke is aware of that when she decides not to play any games with him but be to be truthful and unaffected instead:

And so Vibeke, instead of trying to seduce King Christian [...] tried to console him. She relinquished her efforts to be beautiful. She did not care whether her stomach bulged or her chins trembled or whether she ate too much or whether her teeth sometimes had to be taken out in the middle of the meal, for she saw that these things, which might once have been important to him, no longer were. What was important to him was her companionship and her affection. (MaS, 412)

Christian's relationship with Vibeke is one of the instances of the transformative power of love in Tremain's prose. Having been haunted by guilt over the death of Bror Brorson, his friend from youth, Christian has not been able to find peace within

himself, and has become insensitive to the suffering of others. The guilt that has tormented him was probably also the reason of his unhappy choice with a second wife, the lack of self-respect causing him to seek punishment in a relationship with a woman who would not love him back.

Now, finally finding in Vibeke the person he can completely trust, he tells her about what has tormented him for so many years. Sharing the trauma of Bror's tragic, violent death, which he is indirectly responsible for, with a person who loves him has a therapeutic, healing effect on him. With a newly gained self-acceptance comes the potential to get closer to the divine and thus finally find peace.

It is not coincidental that Vibeke has the same vision of an observatory as Christian's first wife, Anna. The motif of the noble, high situated place reappears in Vibeke's mind as a symbol of a fulfilling and fruitful relationship. Now, the construction of the observatory is not an impossible task any more; Christian is mature enough to 'reach' to it, just like Merivel has become worthy of reaching the circular room in the West Turret. Completion of the 'internal pathway to the heavens' becomes associated with the completion of Christian's personality which he identifies with his country:

And when at last this tower is completed, then I think people shall come from all the world to see it and to note how, in Denmark, we build structures that have nothing of shoddiness or weakness in any part of them. (MaS, 482)

3. Destructiveness of obsession

In every Tremain's novel, we can find individuals – or at least allusions to them – who are considered insane in society and isolated in the institutions for mentally ill. These figures play a minor but important part in Tremain's novels. When we compare them with other characters of Tremain's prose – for example with those described above – we find that they are not so different from them. What more, these two groups are often indistinguishable from each other.

By using this tactic, Tremain shows us that the difference between the obsession that affects her 'normal' characters and madness of the 'mentally ill' is often undeterminable or even non-existent. How do we actually define madness? I have described the obsession with physical love and the possessiveness that many of Tremain's male characters cannot resist, and which often results in violence. If we consider mad the people who are dangerous to others or to themselves because they cannot control their passions, we cannot deny that these characters have, at least for a few moments of their lives, suffered a temporary madness.

When depicting the lives of her characters, Tremain is particularly interested in their romantic relationships. Thus, it is especially the obsession with sex and romantic love that she examines. In the following chapter, I want to focus on the theme of obsession and madness as it affects both her male and female characters, deriving from sexuality and sexual relationships. At the same time, I want to draw parallels between the 'sane' and 'insane' figures.

3.1 *Restoration*

The theme of obsession is perhaps the most important issue in the book. Apart from Celia's and Merivel's intense unhappy love for the King, there is Katharine's childish attachment to Merivel. It is important to realize the connection between these three relationships. Celia's and Merivel's relationships with the King are more or less

two variants on the same theme of subordination and domination, obsession and exploitation, while Katherine's dependence on Merivel is a mocking mirror of these two relationships.

In Katherine's attitude to love we cannot trace the fake sophistication that we find by Celia and Merivel. There is no Indian Nightingale that would symbolize the presupposed nobility of Katherine's emotions. Her dream is simple: she wants a man who would take care of her and never leave her. She is basically unable of living on her own. Thanks to the simplicity with which she expresses herself we can better see the essence of every relationship based on obsession, which is the inability to take full responsibility for one's own life and the resulting dependency.

When Katherine tries to kill herself and is then asked why she has done so, she simply replies: 'Because Robert has left me. He has ridden away'(R, 241). We know that Merivel did not even intend to leave Whittlesea and we look at Katherine with pity, regarding her as a mentally ill simpleton. However, we can find similar irrational behaviour by both Merivel and Celia whom we regard – and who are treated by society – as mentally healthy.

Pearce observes an analogy between a case of a woman that was mad from 'the poisoned blood [that] had entered her brain' and Merivel's condition after he realizes that the King has abandoned him. In this place of the novel, like in many others, he likens Merivel's obsession to madness: 'You are possessed by one thought: you wish the King to draw you back to him and to love you. In the absence of this love, you are literally mad with grief'(75). Merivel himself is aware of the analogy between him and the mad Katharine, first when he chooses particularly her to cure, and most visibly when he and Katharine talk – Katherine seriously, he jokingly - about the 'leaving step' by which their beloved ones abandoned them (R, 222).

Similarly, Celia displays the same irrational determination - to be loved or die – as Katharine: 'I have no choice. I must hope or die. For to no other thing on earth do I give any value whatsoever. There is no other thing for me but this' (R, 79). If the King left her for good, it is probable that she would try to kill herself like Katharine. It is reflected in Merivel's fear: once he has a dream in which Celia, resembling Ophelia,

drowns. Merivel decides in a brief moment of enlightenment to advise Celia not to succumb to the poisonous hope in the King's love, following the advice that Pearce gave to him: "“If,” I would say to her, “you permit yourself to hope, you will come to insanity, Celia, and then I cannot tell what will become of you””(R, 99). Here we can see that the “bad” hope, which is a synonym for obsession, is once again related to insanity.

By associating obsession with madness as Tremain does in case of both Merivel and Celia, she shows that telling the difference between normality and insanity is a tricky and often impossible task. People who are claimed insane are usually kept isolated from society and watched so that they cannot hurt others or/and themselves. Such is the case of the Whittlesea Hospital where Katharine is a patient and Merivel the ‘Keeper’. But on which presumptions do people decide who is to be the patient and who the caretaker? Merivel is given a chance to become useful there with his medical and surgical skills, but Pearce justifiably downplays his position at Whittlesea, pointing out that he, too, needs to be cured: ‘Our task here is to cure you of childishness just as we are trying to cure the lunatics of their insanity’(R, 208).

Merivel is incompetent in “curing” Celia of her obsession when he does not give her truthful information about what the King asked him to tell her, that is, that she will never be more than one of the many mistresses of the King and that she must not hope for more. Instead, he pollutes Celia's mind with false hope when he lies to her, saying that the King wishes her to stay at Bidnold until ‘an awareness of the changeful nature of all things has grown upon [her]’(R, 104). Such a vague message can be interpreted in any way and it is probable that Celia will interpret it according to her liking. Merivel is well aware of that since he says ‘At whatever cost to Celia's sanity and mine, I had become determined to keep her with me under my roof’(R, 103). Out of his selfishness and lust – he is afraid that if he listened to his conscience and told Celia the truth, she would begin to dislike him even more, plus he longs for her company – he puts his and Celia's ‘sanity’ at risk.

Likewise, he is incompetent in his treatment of Katharine. The special attention he gives to her leads only to her undesirable love for him. With the help of Ambrose, he finds a cure for her sleeplessness: ‘the rubbing of the soles of the feet with black soap

may succeed in drawing down from the brain the noisiness within it and so still it and let it rest'(R, 230). This cure however cannot heal Katharine as its effects last only for the time when the feet are rubbed. Nevertheless, it gains more efficiency as Katherine's attachment to Merivel intensifies. It should be alarming for Merivel that Katherine gets into the state when she can be soothed very quickly as soon as Merivel begins to rub her feet with the palm of his hand (R, 253). What calms her down is no longer the stimulation of the nerves on her feet with the rough soap but Merivel's touching her. This is the beginning of the sensual relationship between them, though Merivel may not admit it.

Merivel's worst failure is letting his relationship with Katherine go too far. On the one hand, Katharine tempts and provokes Merivel to have sex with her, but on the other, Merivel should resist and stop her attempts to seduce him since he is in charge of the mentally-ill at Whittlesea and since he is, due to his position, supposed to act like an adult. Nonetheless, he is incapable to control his lust, and so he begins to engage with Katherine in what he calls 'a love of the most Profane kind' (R, 271). He does so even though he knows that her addiction to him is growing with every visit that he pays her. He has to lie to her so that their sexual activity continues, soothing her with false declarations of his love. Thus he abuses her both sexually and emotionally. Eventually, when their affair is revealed, he does not only have to leave Whittlesea but he is ordered by other Keepers to take Katherine with him and look after her. Naturally, he would gladly run away from Katherine and their unborn child if the Keepers did not make him accept his responsibility for her.

As I said, Celia's behaviour resembles Katherine's to a great extent. Like Katharine, Celia uses her female sexual power to draw the man she loves to her. And also like Katharine, she is incapable of overcoming her obsession with her beloved, letting it become the centre of her existence. We could argue that their Celia's and Katherine's obsession is a consequence of the nature of the age when women had no other choice than to rely on men, if they wanted to escape poverty.

However, there is the central character of Merivel, a male hero who is apt to obsession and dependence as much as they are. It seems that Tremain chose the historical background of the seventeenth-century England not because of the feministic

aspect – though it is certainly present in the novel – but because she wanted to draw parallels between this age of obsession and our contemporary materialistic society. People can be greedy of many things, including love. Tremain is interested predominantly in love and sexuality in her novels and she shows romantic love as the chief object of addiction which can easily turn into insanity. Therefore, when Merivel speaks about madness, he cannot omit love from it: ‘there are so many kinds of madness and folly – of which love, perhaps, is both the sweetest and the most fearful – that I hardly know where to begin’ (R, 340).

Merivel certainly knows what he is talking about – the madness of love, or in his case rather the madness of lust, caused that he endangered both his and Celia’s sanity and also Katharine’s life. His unhealthy passion for the King made him prone to despair and caused that he has lost half of his life in futile dreaming. Tremain points out the similarity between the patients at Whittlesea and people living outside of it so as to show that madness is not only an attribute of mentally ill people, but that it probably affects to some extent all of us.

3.2 *Music and Silence*

The ‘mad’ character of *Music and Silence* is Johnnie O’Fingal. In the first years of his marriage with Francesca Ponti, he seems completely happy. But one night, his life changes. He has a dream in which he composes a melody so beautiful that he ‘[does] not think he [has] ever heard in his life anything to match it’ (MaS, 34). Not knowing what harm threatens to happen to her husband, Francesca persuades him to try to play the music that is in his mind. Since then, Johnnie’s mental illness begins to develop. He tries in vain to capture the beautiful music of his dream, but, in reality, he is able to compose only its beginning. From the longing becomes an obsession which makes him forget everyone and everything except the enthralling melody. As he is incapable to realise his vision, he grows bitter and aggressive, abandoning all his former, ‘normal’ life in the torturing and destructive search for the melody.

Christian, whom I spoke of in the preceding chapter, shares with Johnnie the desire for the transcendental. However, he does not go mad in the search of it. The

cause of Johnnie's or Larry's despair is their trying to find the perfection they long for in themselves. In her Realism, Tremain shows that there is no perfection inside of us; we have to seek it elsewhere. Christian finds a way to the absolute in the end, but before that, his life is marked by delusions and errors. His building of Frederiksborg represents his search for the transcendental in himself and his love for Kirsten is misguided in the same way. There is madness in him, apparent especially in his obsession with Kirsten, which connects him with Johnnie O'Fingal.

There are some extraordinary characters in *Music and Silence*, in which Tremain examines her recurring theme of obsession and madness. I want to talk about two of them, Kirsten and Magdalena. They are not considered mad by their surroundings like Johnnie is. However, there is the same irrational drive in them that hurls them into catastrophe. They are persuaded that there is only one true pleasure in life – sexual power. Like Johnnie, they become so obsessed with seeking their selfish pleasure that they lose the knowledge of what is right and wrong and indulge completely in their schemes. Nonetheless, their appetite for power is unquenchable, just like Johnnie's appetite for music is. Every time they try to satisfy it, they only become greedier. Kirsten and Magdalene are actually a bigger threat to society than Johnnie. Unlike Johnnie's, their madness has not been diagnosed and so it keeps growing and spreading.

Magdalena, the housekeeper of a house full of males, is probably the most voluptuous heroine of Tremain's prose, with her blood-red skirts and 'buxom peasant beauty' (MaS, 68). She is the embodiment of the sexual passion that intensifies in the household since her arrival. She realizes the potential of her power there and is ready to use it. Johann Tilsen, the widowed father of five sons and one daughter and Magdalene's employer, wants to 'possess' Magdalena 'from the moment he [sees] her' (MaS, 37). On the very first morning of Magdalena's service, he is determined to have sex with her:

...he followed Magdalena to the linen closet, bolted the door, positioned her wide hips over a linen chest and entered her from behind. She did not resist him but on the contrary murmured that she had never experienced anything she liked more than being taken in this way. (MaS, 37)

Johann thinks that he has control over Magdalena when he tells her: 'As your employer, I wish to do this from time to time' (MaS, 37). However, Magdalena's cunning reaction during the sexual intercourse, by which she intensifies Johann's arousal and makes him addicted to her body, suggests otherwise. What Johann wrongly perceives as a manifestation of his male dominance, is in fact the first of Magdalena's victories which marks the beginning of her rule in the family.

Tremain often expresses the intensity of sexual passion by means of the imagery related to food. In a dream of Merivel's, Tremain associates his passion, which is symbolized by colours, with eating: '[I] then was carried by the wind out into the sky and hung like a ghost above the park, filling myself with colour so that I became fat with it, with the purple of the beeches and the lush green of the grass' (R, 358). Or, when Mary kisses Pearl in a violent outburst of sexual passion, she imagines to 'drink' her 'sweetness': I put my tongue into her mouth and sucked all her sweetness. I drank her. My head grew light with the sweetness of my precious thing (SC, 274). A similar connectedness of sex and food when expressing the passionate love can be found in the way the relationship of Klaus and Gervaise is described: '[Larry] gets to his feet and begins a round of toasts to Gervaise who looks so young in the candlelight, so young and happy that Klaus wants to gobble her bright lips with his meal' (SPS, 153).

This method is also used to capture Magdalena's greediness for power. The two younger Johann's sons are too small to be in love with her like the two oldest ones, but Magdalena nevertheless binds them to herself when she engages with them in intimacies such as licking the cream off their fingers. In this instance as well as in the preceding examples, Tremain uses the association of eating and oral sex to make her gourmet metaphors effective. In addition, overabundant eating in Tremain's texts always stands for the intemperance of sexual passion. In human life, eating is a never ending process – after we digest one meal, we are hungry for another, and so on. Our hunger can never be ultimately satisfied. With sexual obsession (or with any other obsession, for that matter) it is very similar. Therefore, Magdalena's passion for food, which represents her obsession for sexual power, knows no limits:

She's taken to spoiling herself with all the delicacies that can be procured in the neighbourhood, easily persuading her husband to purchase goose livers and

cream, capons for stuffing, quail eggs, partridges, lambs' tails and pigs' trotters. Her flesh expands. Her cheeks are fat and rosy. That 'fearful' perfume of hers seems to increase in intensity. She reigns and the men follow after, always yearning and then again yearning... (MaS, 67)

Magdalena's physical prosperity signifies her success in enslaving the masculine household. As her flesh expands, so does her power. After Johann, she makes her lover of Ingmar, the oldest son. She enjoys the control she has over both the son and his father:

Power.

The older man kept in ignorance; his appetite fed by his own sense of his sin. The younger man kept in a state of wanting and waiting; his longing fed by the knowledge of what his father did.

Power which, once known, cannot be matched except by repetition. Power that can now be replicated in this family. Magdalena knows that, for her, there is nothing on earth more complete than this. (MaS, 301)

She cannot imagine anything sweeter than power. 'Converting' first Johann and his eldest son, she moves to the next son in line, Wilhelm, because 'power [can] be matched [only] by repetition.' However, as capable of controlling others as she is, she cannot control her own obsession, which becomes fatal to her.

Magdalena's decline in power and her violent death are predicted by a nightmarish experience of Johann's youngest son Marcus. After Magdalena gives a birth to her daughter Ulla in the lake, Marcus goes to look at her placenta that has remained in the water. He does not know what it is and it terrifies him:

And then he sees what he's looking for. It begins as a stem, a cluster of crimson threads under the water, and the threads go upwards to the surface of the lake. And on the surface is the thing, like a blood-filled fungus, the thing that came out of Magdalena's body. It bobs and floats like a giant lily, and all around it is a frenzy of tiny fishes, nibbling at it and feeding. Even as Marcus watches, the thing begins to tear and break apart. (MaS, 191)

Here, Tremain uses Marcus's subjectivity when creating a metaphor about Magdalena's madness spread in the family. In Marcus's view, Magdalena's placenta is not just a part of her body; it becomes an embodiment of the evil inside of her. It starts

with inconspicuous bud deadly little beginnings, the 'crimson threads under the water' and develops in a monstrous 'fungus' which feeds by sucking other people's passions and obsessions that are symbolized by blood. It is a symbiotic relationship in which Magdalena's admirers also seek their satisfaction, like a 'frenzy of tiny fishes, nibbling at it and feeding.'

Nevertheless, such a relationship is too self-destructive to last long. Magdalena's egoistic passion finally destroys her; like the 'blood-filled fungus' flowing on the water, she has no roots that would keep her alive. In the relationship with the second oldest son Wilhelm, she loses control over the situation when his sexual obsession starts to blend with an intense hatred of her: 'he says that if he cannot fornicate with her he will kill her. He owns a knife. He will plunge his knife into her breast' (MaS, 391).

Magdalena wonders whether she should 'play one last card and let her husband discover her with Wilhelm – to inflict on him the final delirious torment that might ... put him in thrall to her forever' (MaS, 392). But she decides against this, because she is afraid that 'to do this would be to open the door of a cage, not knowing what lay inside it, what venomous snakes, what vultures with heavy wings and vicious claws, what scorpions' (MaS, 392). By this metaphor, Tremain suggest that there is a potential for madness in each of us, waiting hidden in under the skin of our civilised self, that, when released, inevitably leads to destruction.

Such an act of destruction comes from Wilhelm. Magdalena is careful not to overdo her games with Johann, her husband, but she does not foresee the madness that affects Wilhelm. Their sexual affair is pathologic from the start. Wilhelm finds an old barn for them when they can enjoy their dark passions without being interrupted. It is situated

beyond the fruit fields, where nothing is stored and no one comes, and where rats screech from under the walls. It is neither comfortable nor warm, but it is dark and secret, and smells of the earth and the secretions of rats, and what occurs there with Magdalena is as thrilling to Wilhelm as anything he has ever known or believes he will know. (MaS, 391)

The desolate character of the place, where ‘nothing is stored’ and which is ‘neither comfortable nor warm’, implies the absence of love in Magdalena and Wilhelm’s relationship. Likewise, the smell of the earth signifies its base and degrading nature. The rats that ‘screech from under the walls’ stand for the constant possibility of danger, which threatens in the darkness.

The climax of Wilhelm and Magdalena’s violent passion comes in Magdalena’s death. Eventually, Wilhelm succumbs to madness and beats Magdalena’s body with such a force that she, being pregnant, miscarries and bleeds to death. Wilhelm’s violent act is his response to Magdalena’s oppressive need to control. The dying in her own blood has, of course, a symbolic function: Magdalena dies in consequence of her uncontrollable passion and the madness that it initiates.

Kirsten, the King’s wife, is as desirous of power as Magdalena, though she does not have such conditions to satisfy her desire. She is fed up with being Christian’s possession and determined to make her life as much her own as she wants. Although she lives in the age of sexual inequality, she refuses to be a passive victim of male will - like all the heroines of the novel. She envies men their power, often revealing in her writing an aggression that we would normally associate with a male character:

Long ago, when I was his girl bride and I would tickle him with my small white fingers he found this nickname ‘Mouse’...But those days are past...I no longer have the slightest desire to be a ‘mousie.’ I would prefer to be a rat. Rats have sharp teeth that will bite. Rats carry disease that will kill. Why do husbands refuse to understand that we women do not for long remain their Pet Creatures? (MaS, 8)

Though Kirsten defies male authority, she is no defender of women either. On the contrary, she often uses the tactics against which she fights, copying the male exploitation of women. For example, she intentionally emphasizes the inferior status of her waiting maids, whom she is very possessive about:

They like to be known as ‘Gentlewomen’ or ‘Ladies-in-Waiting,’ but I do not see why any such Titles should be given to people who are in every way inferior to me. So I refer to them merely as my *Women*. (MaS, 24)

Kirsten's arrogant and often violent behaviour is her way of ventilating her frustration. She lacks any meaning in her life, and she tries to compensate for that by various substitutes. At the beginning of her marriage with Christian, it was probably the fascination with the king's position and money and the excitement with her own power which temporarily filled her life. Now, she has found a substitute in her new lover, Count Otto Ludwig of Salm. Her relationship with him cannot possibly be called love, although she uses that word. She loves only her own pleasure and is determined to have it regardless of her lover's needs. With her abusive tendencies, she resembles Merivel in *Restoration* and Agnes in *The Swimming Pool Season*.

Like Magdalena, Kirsten knows how to enslave a man. Thus, when Otto complains that she is 'too avid for [her] pleasure' (MaS, 56), she encourages him to beat her as a punishment, knowing that when she provokes his dark fantasies about domination, he will not be able to resist her. As their greediness increases, the sadomasochism in their sexual practices grows in intensity. When thinking of her obsession, Kirsten identifies herself with 'mad people;' she also calls it 'veritable derangement.' In this way, Tremain suggests that Kirsten, too, has gone mad:

I know that when I shall see these lovely Whips I shall so pant to use them upon Otto that I may in my frenzy tear his breeches and find upon my lips some flecks of Foam, such as Mad People do give forth. And from this I see that my enslavement to Otto, and his to me, is indeed a veritable Derangement, as though we two were inhabitants of some Other World where no one walks but us and where no ordinary matters are considered, but only this one Thing... (MaS, 91)

Kirsten's insanity isolates her from reality in the exploration of her mad, fantastic world, as happens with Estelle in *Sacred Country* and old Mallélou in *The Swimming Pool Season*, who are described below. After she is exiled from the Court to Juteland, she cannot continue in her sexual affair any more, but she is already too damaged by her obsession to find any satisfaction in the real world where 'ordinary matters are considered.' As opposed to Christian whose character positively develops, she sinks deeper and deeper into confusion. She loses ability to interpret reality and learn any lesson from her mistakes. Consequently, her life ends in madness. She changes reality for a self-destructive and abusive escape into a sexual fantasy with two black slaves of hers:

This Fault or Weakness within my Memory may be the Thing which leads me perpetually into a very lamentable Confusion. And I feel this Confusion spread to all Things upon the Earth, so that that which was once Inimical to my soul is confounded with all that dazzled it and I know not where to go or what to seek after, nor whither my Life is headed.

All I can do is to return to my Boys, Samuel and Emmanuel. They are the Children of Spirits and not tethered by any Expectation to this Loathsome World.

I take their hands in mine, the Black upon the White and the White upon the Black, and I say to them: 'Give me the Wings of Angels, the Wings of Demons. Lift me up and let me fly.' (MaS, 485)

It is symbolic that, for Kirsten, black and white or angels and demons do not stand in opposition any more. In her confused mind, good mingles with evil so that she is no longer capable of telling the difference between them. This 'moral' impairment is also a product of the insanity that affects her.

3.3 *Sacred Country*

Like in *Restoration*, there is an asylum for people with mental impairments in *Sacred Country*. Such a place is usually supposed to stand in contrast with the world of the 'normal' society; however, in Tremain's texts it is never so. Rather, the asylum is a mirror reflecting the world behind its doors.

Estelle, Mary's mother, is a character who provides a connection between these two worlds. During her adult life, she lives variably at home and in the asylum. She goes to live in the asylum on her own free will, finding in it an escape from reality. Since she has the need to be there, we can presume that she is as mentally ill as other patients there. But what does demonstrate her madness?

Tremain describes mental illness as a condition when someone's obsession diverts them from order, so that they can no longer function as members of 'normal' society. For example, Estelle says that she has come to the asylum Mountview because otherwise she would have to 'commit a crime' (SC, 162). To avoid hurt, she seeks

asylum in Mountview. However, her passivity is as hurtful as the 'crime' she has prevented committing. Wasting one's life in idle fantasies is as destructive as living it sinfully. Estelle hurts herself, because she does not use her potential to live fully and she hurts others, especially her children, when she neglects them. Her fantasies do not allow her to care about anyone or anything else.

Therefore, Estelle's excessive dreaming can be considered madness. It is a very common diagnose in Tremain's novels – we can find it by such characters as Merivel and Celia in *Restoration*, Larry, Dr. O and old Mallélou in *The Swimming Pool Season* and Christian, Kirsten and Johnnie O'Fingal in *Music and Silence*. Actually, all madness can be viewed as diverting from reality into another world in such an extent that this another world becomes more important to the mentally ill person than the real one. In Tremain's prose, the imaginary world usually functions as a substitute for love.

Estelle finds her substitute in watching TV. What enthrals her most about it is her dream lover, an English footballer Bobby Moore:

I am in love. My love is far away and never speaks to me but this is the way of the world. He is Bobby Moore, the captain of England...All that I care about now is his destiny and the destiny of what he calls the 'squad.' And that is all any of us at Mountview cares about: football. We have forgotten our lives and what was in them...We are all sliding away fast. And we don't want it to end. (SC, 163)

After some time, the potential of Estelle's fantasy is exhausted and it has to be exchanged for another; Estelle's obsession, like Magdalena's, cannot be matched except by repetition. It is not really important what the object of Estelle's fantasies is, for her obsession is being in love with love. As her 'love affairs' take place only in her head, she succumbs more and more to selfishness. She stops being able to be touched by real things; only dreaming excites her. Thus, when she reaches orgasm after many years, it can only be in a dream:

...before Irene was up and ironing the dress one last time, before Timmy was awake and saying his prayers, I had an orgasm. Nothing and no one touched me, except in a dream. But the orgasm was real and I woke up in the middle of it and cried with pleasure.

I couldn't remember the dream. And I couldn't remember when I'd last had an orgasm. It might have been in 1966 when I was in love with Bobby Moore, captain of England. (SC, 282)

Similarly, when Merivel in *Restoration* loses the control over his fantasies in the 'colossal epidemic of dreaming,' (R, 358) he stops being able to get satisfaction from anything else but his dreams about Bidnold, which he recreates in his mind as an imaginary world of pleasure: 'There were no people in these dreams, yet they were dreams of the most sensual kind from which, when the morning came, I did not want to be parted' (R, 358). In the life of Estelle and Merivel, Tremain shows the danger of such auto-erotic fantasies. An excessive indulgence in them necessarily leads to self-centeredness and isolation and causes losing the contact with reality.

Sacred Country, like all Tremain's novels, challenges reader's perception of what is normal and what is beyond the norm. Estelle is considered mentally ill or at least problematic by society because of the time she spends at Mountview. But when we compare her with other characters, which do not bear the stigma of Mountview patients, we cannot make any generalization about her or their mental condition. For instance, Estelle's husband Sonny, whose aggressiveness caused by the trauma from World War II I have already described, seems much more insane a character than Estelle.

Likewise, Tremain points out the relativity of the 'norm' by choosing the theme of transsexuality. By the time that *Sacred Country* was written, it has been considered acceptable, if not normal, by the general public. In 1963, however, when Mary decides for physical transformation to become male in all respects, an individual's identification with a gender that is not biologically their sex is considered by most people a deviation. Mary describes the incomprehension that she faces after telling people how she feels about her body:

I realised after my visit to the doctor that telling somebody about myself wasn't as hard as I'd imagined. I just said some words and there it was, over. Except that it wasn't, because the words had not been believed. I might as well have said, 'I am the Virgin Mary.' I was thought to be suffering from delusion. (SC, 133)

By many people, Mary's problem is misinterpreted as psychiatric deviation. With her label of a 'psycho,' Mary begins to identify with the people who are considered mentally ill:

My mother told me she had a friend at Mountview who thought she was a chicken. And this was why this person was locked up there. No one examined her for feathers. No one offered her a worm. I thought of writing to her: 'This country is afraid of the unusual,' but then I found that I didn't relish the idea of writing a letter to a hen. I was as narrow-minded as everyone else. (SC, 133)

Tremain uses this exaggeration (or is it really an exaggeration?) about the relativity of 'normality' to emphasize the prejudices against 'mentally ill' people in contemporary society. The fact that an individual is locked in the asylum does not make them necessarily insane, neither does the fact that they are not automatically makes them sane. Rather, as Tremain suggests, all excessive obsession – whether in 'normal' people or 'mentally ill' people - is insane.

3.4 *The Swimming Pool Season*

The Swimming Pool Season is a novel about strong women and weak, dependent men. When compared to the two historical novels, men and women here do not have such distinct roles in society. Female characters in *Restoration* and *Music and Silence* have, because of the historical context, only limited possibilities how to gain any power. However, they do what they can to achieve some, often at the expense of men. Their weapon is usually their sexuality.

In *Restoration*, Celia is content with being the King's plaything on condition that it is only her who he plays with. Heroines of *Music and Silence* are more ambitious than that. Emilia defies her father's authority when he wants to marry her to

a man he has chosen for her. Kirsten and Magdalena do not satisfy with a mere self-defence against men; they plot an aggressive attack.

Sacred Country begins in the 1950s when women are still, more or less, supposed to fulfil the traditional ideal of a woman, which stresses domesticity, obedience and femininity. Such a stereotype is naturally even stronger in the country, the primary location of the novel. Mary, who is born in the 1940s, has a need to rebel against her spiteful, chauvinistic father, and her transsexuality can be viewed as a result of this need.

The Swimming Pool Season is different to these novels - as far as the male-female relationships are concerned – mainly due to the more modern setting of the 1980s. Its heroines do not need to defy the male control in order to achieve independence, since they are generally viewed as men's equals. From this point of view, characters such as Miriam's mother Leni, a femme fatale playing sexual games with men which gives her a feeling of power, or Agnés, a young virgin finding bliss in domestic tasks, are viewed as somewhat anachronistic.

The fight between the sexes over power and dominance has remained but this time men feel to be in defence. Women are stronger; they do not longer need men to complement them. The resulting lack of self-esteem among men is partly a consequence of this. Of course, there are a few exceptions to the rule – there are weak female characters (Margaret) and a few strong male heroes (Klaus) in *The Swimming Pool Season*. However, the general tendency of the novel shows that, in contrast to the three other discussed texts, where the weaknesses of men are matched by those of women, *The Swimming Pool Season* portrays a modern crisis of the male sex.

I already spoke about the romantic delusion which affects Larry. The same delusion influences most male characters in *The Swimming Pool Season*. Larry's, Xavier's and to a certain extent also Hervé's infatuation with Agnés is a result of their need to dominate women. Agnés is an old-fashioned young woman who loves cooking and keeping everything in her house nice and clean, which activities are clearly a substitute for real feelings that she is incapable of. Tremain seems to have created this

character as a parody of a Stepford wife. She does not criticize Agnés's desire for a neat domestic life as such but Agnés's obsession with this desire.

Larry and Xavier unconsciously see in Agnés a woman that is easy to manipulate with. They also misinterpret her physical beauty and virginity. Nadia, the heroine of *The Swimming Pool Season* who functions as a commentator on the actions of other characters, complains about their delusion and the repetitiveness of male fantasies in general:

'Every man in Nadia's life is sighing after these little princesses. But what madness, you know. What stupidity. I just don't know why they are doing this. Why is youth so wonderful? Just for the buds of tits and flat belly? Perhaps this is all you're wanting in the end. Not companionship. Not any intellectual conversationing. Not any loyalty and familiar person. Just tits and maidenforms.' (SPS, 202)

The delusion of Larry and Xavier lies in their belief that Agnés's appearance corresponds with her personality. Like many of Tremain's heroines, Agnés is actually arrogant and selfish, seeking her own pleasure at the expense of others. This is demonstrated especially in her relationship with Xavier. She uses him to satisfy her sexual desire, while intending to marry her fiancé Luke. She has sex with Xavier in order to learn how to achieve her own pleasure so that she does not later 'betray her marriage' with Luke (SPS, 150). Of course, she does not love Luke, she only imagines him to be a perfect partner for her, and the seeming perfection is all she wants in life.

Xavier's love for Agnés and Agnés's incapability of love is evident when Tremain describes their passionate meetings:

The smell of her steals away his breath. No woman he's ever held had this sweet, irresistible smell. *I want it forever*, says his entranced mind. *Marry me*. She kisses him so hard, his lip is bruised... Her desire and not his love, which is a slower thing, a marvelling spectator, hurls him swiftly to his male buck's antics, butting up into her [...] while she screams and bites and twists her head on its bed of earth and yells to heaven in her pleasure and tears his seed from him like an explosion of flowers [...] He wants to love her more slowly than this, love her with words and small caresses, with his humanity. He's not her stud, her buck, her bull. He adores her with the core of his being. (SPS, 223)

On the one hand, Xavier's being in love is a positive feeling, since it stimulates his tenderness, but on the other, it is destructive because it leads him into delusion and consequently into despair. In contrast to his gentle love, Agnès's sexual obsession is violent and hurtful, as it is shown in the excerpt above. She knows that he loves her and that she does wrong when pretending she cares for him, but still, she is interested only in what she can get out of him. She may not realize what she is doing, lacking empathy and the knowledge of what it feels like to be in love. Anyway, Xavier's intemperance of love is as 'insane' or beyond the norm as her absence of it.

What threatens to happen to Xavier after Agnès leaves him is becoming a copy of his father, whom Larry calls 'old Mallélou.' Old Mallélou is probably the least likable of all Tremain's characters. Yet Tremain is generally sympathetic about every one of them and capable of making us understand even the vulgar and primitive Mallélou. She achieves this by showing us his dreams. Mallélou is a simple-minded man, incapable of love, who fills his time with obscene sexual fantasies. He often thinks of the objects from the time when he still worked as a signalman: 'the signal hut, the tin mugs of coffee,' and, especially, 'the ashtray the shape of a woman'. It seems that what he particularly liked about the job was stubbing out his first cigarette 'in that woman's pussy' (SPS, 17).

This vulgar memory reveals what Mallélou used to enjoy most about life: his virility and sexual potency. Sex, first with his wife and then with his German mistress, was the only source of his assurance. He remembers with nostalgia the time when he could show his male dominance: 'He'd arrive at Marisa's place with a hard heart and a stiff cock, not weak then or afraid or frozen, but ready to do business his way, Mallélou's way...' (SPS, 75). Now, when he is old and impotent, he has no self-respect anymore. Incapable of living with himself, he loses his life in the futile dreams of his past.

He resembles Larry in this respect: with the loss of his - however questionable - manhood, he feels similarly helpless. But unlike Larry, Mallélou is too old and narrow-minded to achieve any change; there is no hope for him. So he lives passively beside his younger and vital wife Gervaise, inventing stories about a better life. With Klaus,

another man who lives in Gervaise's household, they like to watch a TV programme about Robert X, a James Bond type who 'is able to become, at will, numberless things' (SPS, 39) and at the end of each episode goes to bed with a beautiful girl. Mallélou identifies with Robert X and the programme appeals to him so much that he dreams about an episode in which Robert X becomes a signal man, controlling lives of others. Incapable of taking action himself, Mallélou projects his fantasies onto other men.

Another such man is Klaus. He is a typical alpha male: tall, masculine, charismatic, physically strong. Mallélou admires him especially because of his German origin. He adores Germans for their Nazi past: the totalitarian propaganda appeals to him with its accentuation of physical strength and violence. '[Germans] would run this country well,' he tells his son Xavier once (SPS, 73). Mallélou often boasts about his fighter skills in front of Xavier but he is just all talk; he would like to release his anger and hatred in a violent act, like when he used to beat up his German mistress (SPS, 67), but he feels too weak and old for that. He finds a substitute in dreaming about Klaus's masculinity. Secretly, he wishes to get him to Paris to become a star (SPS, 18). Klaus's content with the work at Gervaise's farm disappoints him – he cannot understand his lack of interest in fame. So, he keeps it secret and finds instead a perverse pleasure in watching Gervaise and Klaus having sex.

Because he is so emotionally crippled, Mallélou is not able to notice the love between Gervaise and Klaus; it is only sex that he can see of their relationship. In his twisted and confused mind, he considers Klaus not his rival but his ally. Therefore he is not jealous; ironically, he is grateful to Klaus for 'possessing' Gervaise instead of him. He imagines that their sexual act is an act of Gervaise's humiliation and Klaus's victory: he sees it as a victory of men over women, Germany over France. He imagines himself at Klaus's place and this fantasy brings him a strange, illusory satisfaction.

He's never questioned, nor found anything strange in his admiration of the German race. I'm a ragged dog, is what he believes; I hoped for a fine, clean master. That Klaus is king of his household saves him from his failures and satisfies his ache to see his peasant wife possessed and mastered...(SPS, 155)

In spite of Mallélou's disturbing presence in the house and at the door of their bedroom, Gervaise and Klaus compose a happy couple, a phenomenon which is very

rare in Tremain's prose. Their relationship is a long and stable one – Klaus is possibly a biological father of Gervaise's adult sons and he has been living with her for a couple of years - so we cannot condemn it as a mere infatuation. Their passion is not only animalistic as Merivel's passions but it is accompanied by trust and tenderness:

The grey, greedy stare of Mallélou at the door is blessedly absent and Gervaise lets tears of happiness and laughter flow onto the hot skin of her lover's shoulder. And he holds her with such gladness. His love sings and trembles in him [...] Rain tears at the darkness, but the bodies of Gervaise and Klaus rock silently in a gentle calm. (SPS, 75)

However, such bliss is exceptional in romantic relationships of Tremain's prose. When it occurs, it is a result of a long development of individuals and a miracle in a sense. Predominantly, Tremain's emphasizes people's delusions and obsessions which prevent their happiness.

All the delusions of the novel's characters are mirrored in the madness of Claude, Nadia's former husband. He has gone mad because of unhappy love; we can presume that Nadia was too strong and independent for him, like Gervaise for old Mallélou or Miriam for Larry. In Claude's mind, the feeling of love for his wife vanished, leaving behind only pain, confusing him because he cannot interpret it:

Claude Lemoine curls his body into a womb and shape and repeats, cold as three glittering icicles in his brain, the three syllables of his wife's name: Na-di-a. It's without form. It's just the cruel, satisfying wound his mind must constantly make. Na-di-a. Na-di-aa...The woman his wife was stands not in but outside this saying of her name [...] The pain is in the word, not in the insubstantial woman who lingers to one side of it. (SPS, 239)

The 'cruel, satisfying wound' Claude's mind 'must constantly make' represents the destructiveness of obsession which tortures almost all Tremain's characters. Tremain points out the similarity between Claude and the other, 'normal' characters of the book, when she likens their longing to his in the metaphor of the wool threads:

The lines of love or longing, if you drew them, they'd crisscross Pomerac like a tangle of wool [...] From the Mallélou house, a tattered thread winds back

through time from the room where Mallélou lies and stares at the wall to a room in Bordeaux where Marissa once lay in her cream satin sheets [...] from Xavier a web is spun, reaching vainly from house to house, from hamlet to hamlet, in search of Agnés, whose name he doesn't know, whose own longings he can't guess at [...] And down into Pomerac, deep into the very centre of the village, comes the cold, black line of the longings of Claude Lemoine. This is the cruellest line. It's threaded not merely to Nadia but to the land on which he once owned two houses. It touches every stone and every season. (SPS, 192)

Claude's line is cruellest, which signifies the extent of his madness. To fill the emptiness inside of him which desires to be loved and appreciated, Claude has invented a fantasy in which he has the honour to know about the end of the world as the first person after Father Le Sueur (SPS, 240), the supervisor of the asylum for the mentally ill where Claude lives.

His delusion is certainly bigger than the delusions of other characters, but how do we establish the division between Claude's madness and the irrationality of such characters as Larry, Nadia (who cannot give up her hopeless love for Hervé), Hervé (who lives alone because he is afraid of a binding relationship, preferring instead the escape into his dreams about luxury) or old Mallélou (who looks for a similar escape in his vulgar fantasies about women and his former lover Marissa)? Tremain suggest that insanity is a relative phenomenon, which cannot be precisely measured or defined.

4. Conclusion

The development of Tremain's male protagonists, whose are dominant in her prose, is structured on the basis of the building that they project. Though it is at the beginning inspired by their male pride and childish desire to be appreciated, they grow up in the process. Most importantly, they learn to deal with the past and with their obsessions, which enables them to focus fully on the present reality.

The type of structure the characters build always somehow reflect their personalities. The building also becomes an existential process through which the characters achieve self-understanding. Larry becomes aware of the ego-centrism that makes him dream of fame and the need to stand out. Though his obsession with Miriam and later Agn  s is projected into the vision of the swimming pool, the process of building itself signifies change and progress. After Miriam leaves Pomerac, Larry must begin 'building' relationships with others and step out from his isolation so that he can bear his loneliness.

Likewise, the new plans to build the observatory mark the hope and meaning that is reborn in Christian's life. Like Merivel and Larry, he abandons his immature fantasies in order to be finally happy and at peace. At the same time, he abandons Rosenborg, the site of romantic love, in order to come there again when he is ready for another, this time fruitful, romantic relationship. He also begins to build the observatory, the transcendental place where earth meets the heavens, which is the result of his new found life balance.

Merivel finds a similar spiritual gratification in the circular white room, which is finally restored to him without the disturbing, appetite provoking rest of the house. At last, he has 'built' his character to the proportions that fits the sacred space.

In contrast with other characters, Mary's psychological and spiritual transformation is visible not on architectural projects but on her own body. She rebuilds herself so that she can become who she really is. However, her transformation is not completed. When King Christian asks Peter Claire what can satisfy his longing 'to be

filled with a sense of wonder', he replies that it can sometimes be satisfied in music, when '[he is] taken to some other part of [himself]...wherein [he is] no longer this habitual semblance of [himself] that walks about and eats and sleeps and is idle, but [himself] *entirely*' (MaS, 239 - 240). In the end, this is the desire of all Tremain's characters, a general human desire to be oneself *entirely*. However, it can never be fully satisfied in this world; despite our longing for the transcendental, we are still earth-bound, governed by our physical urges and confused by the frequent ambiguousness of what we perceive as good and evil. As human beings, we are always far from perfection, remaining incomplete until the day we die.

This incompleteness is implied in all the constructions that the above examined characters build. Tremain does not let her characters finish what they have started in order to point out that we can only approach to perfection but never *become* it. Therefore, Merivel's circular space remains empty of any furniture or design, realization of Christian's and Vibeke's observatory is only implied, Larry cannot finish his pool – neither have we the opportunity to watch him build another one -, and Martin's physical transformation is stopped before its completion.

Even if Martin agreed to the final operation of his physical transformation, the psychological transformation could not be finished. There will always be a part in him that will resist being classified as masculine. He cannot achieve perfection and he realizes that that is not a handicap. He knows that none of us can, as Cord, Martin's grandfather, once remarks:

'We are all something else inside. Old Varindra explained that to me. But he said it's a mistake to think the inner thing is fully formed. It can't possibly be. Nothing grows properly in the dark.' (SC, 276)

In spite of all the progress of the characters, Tremain does not believe that they can ever get rid of their vices completely. Christian does not liberate the unhappy musicians out of his cellar, despite all the enlightenment that he achieves at the end of the novel. Merivel does not become totally capable of self-control at the end of *Restoration*; on the contrary, Tremain emphasizes the remainder of his gluttony: 'Merivel. Just as he was...He puts a hand to his cheek and discovers a cake crumb'

(R, 370). When Larry hears, at the end of *The Swimming Pool Season*, that his swimming pool has been destroyed, his despair reveals that his transformation into an adult has not been achieved yet. Mary's aggression does not diminish with age, since she, at the age of twenty, cannot stop herself from hurting Pearl whom she loves.

However, Tremain is extremely sympathetic to all her characters, and she makes us empathic even to the least likeable figures, such as Sonny in *Sacred Country* or Old Mallélou in *The Swimming Pool Season*. She shows that the inception of all evil is the lack of love and self-acceptance that leads to looking for substitutes, developing obsessions and often ends in madness.

The madness of Tremain's characters demonstrates itself especially in their sexual affairs and romantic relationships. The addiction to a person or sexual stimulation leads to pathologic relationships, obsession with one's fantasies and the loss of interest in every-day reality. These signs of insanity can be found to some extent by the majority of Tremain's characters. Only few of them are lucky not to be prone to any delusions. Therefore, the few but necessary figures in Tremain's prose, who are actually labelled by society as insane (which is evident in their isolation from the 'normal' people to which they are forced) – Johnnie O'Fingal, Katharine, Estelle, Claude Lemoine - function as symbolic mirrors to other characters.

Although there is a feminist aspect in Tremain's portraying the gender relations, her novels cannot be considered feminist. The reversal of traditional roles of female and male characters, which is perhaps most evident in *Sacred Country*, the story about a transsexual, and the subsequent accepting of vices traditionally perceived as male by female characters as their own shows that Tremain does not condemn her male characters for their viciousness, since her female characters are not devoid of it either. Likewise, she does not mock her male heroes for their weaknesses and obsessions, or at least no more than she mocks her female characters. Tremain's heroines, such as Kirsten and Magdalena, are actually more destructive in their obsession to control than their male counterparts. Tremain shows her gender impartiality in another comment of Nadia:

‘It’s like we are all sleepwanderers. Even me. Why am I wait at the window? I don’t know. I know Hervé is leaving. I knew he’s leave without one word to Nadia. And I still wait. Stupidness, no? Sleepwanderers. You, me, Hervé, even these young lovers. So what will happen? You tell me, my dear. What is come next? Winter, we know, that’s all. And perhaps you’re right: all the animals are burrow down and down and snow is coming from Siberia.’ (SPS, 202)

With a few exceptions, all Tremain’s characters are ‘sleepwanderers,’ regardless of their gender or social position. The winter which Nadia talks about, the cold and cruel season of the year, represents the emptiness, despair and loss of meaning that are inevitable from time to time. They are the signs that something is not right in our lives, that we have neglected something important. In all novels of hers, Tremain shows the reactions of her characters to this crisis. They all set about finding the way out of it; however, some of them achieve to fulfil at least partially their innermost desire for the transcendental whereas others do not even realize it, escaping instead into their fantasies like the animals who ‘burrow down and down’ while ‘snow is coming from Siberia.’

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